

Grassroots spaces of recovery: Alternative organising for mental health

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In the UK, it is estimated that 1 in 4 persons will experience a mental health issue at some point in their life. The provision of care for mental health through the National Health Service (NHS) has shifted considerably over the past two decades, towards a focus on short-term therapeutic interventions (Improving Access to Psychological Therapy - IAPT) and community support, with a corresponding reduction in the number of beds available for inpatient care. However, it is now broadly acknowledged that mental health care is failing to meet its objectives (NHS Five Year Forward View). Service providers are under-resourced and unable to meet needs, particularly in complex cases. Service user groups have been critical of the inadequacy of care in support of both episodes of crisis and for long-term recovery, and of the use of overly broad diagnostic labels as cornerstone of the mental health system (Kinderman et al, 2013). Critics have also pointed to the role of reduction in public services under the austerity measures adopted since 2010 (Mattheys, 2015), given the strong correlation between mental health and poverty (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). It is in this context that a range of grassroots initiatives for providing support for mental health and recovery has emerged (see McGrath & Reavey, 2018). These include dedicated spaces such recovery cafes and green spaces, along with community spaces for collaborative writing, art and sport, and broader networks that work to improve the environments where mental health care and support can be provided (see Walker et al, 2017). Mental health service users who act as 'experts by experience' typically organize these spaces and initiatives, and focus on lived experiences of mental health (Cromby et al, 2013) rather than diagnostic criterion. Existing work on 'alternative organizing' (Parker et al, 2014) provides a framework to understand these grassroots approaches to mental health and their relationship to NHS provision. In particular, it provides a focus on the unique organizational structures, relationships and practices that are enacted by service user led initiatives.

The successful applicant's research would investigate how grassroots spaces of recovery operate as forms of 'alternative organizing'. It would seek to analyse the distinctive features of these spaces and the ways in which they facilitate support for persons who use mental health services and those outside of service use. The research proposal should specify appropriate qualitative methodologies and design, along with specific research questions to be pursued. Applications are particularly welcome from applicants with an existing interest in or prior experience of, mental health recovery.

About the supervisor:

Steve is a social psychologist who has researched mental health service user experiences of care and recovery across a number of secure settings. His most recent book, *Vital Memory and Affect*, draws on ten years of work with groups who have challenging or traumatic lived experiences. Opportunities for access to and engagement with service user led groups will be provided.

References and Further Reading

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